1: Lowie E-5 (1926) 1939 NT20 Washo NT20

ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE WASHO

BY

ROBERT H. LOWIE

I. INTRODUCTION

A SKETCH by Barrett, mainly relating to museum specimens, Kroeber's list of kinship terms, Hudson's notes on games in Culin's monograph, and a few mythological texts by Dangberg constitute our technical sources on the Washo.[1] Several weeks at Minden, Nevada (informant, Dave Cheney), and at Coleville, California (principal informants, Jack Pitts and Bill Cornbread), in 1926 supplied the data here offered.

The Washo (waco, woco), classed either as an isolated stock or as an aberrant Hokan group, ranged about Lake Tahoe (t'i''yeli ta''au), residing in westernmost Nevada and easternmost California. Carson City, Reno, Minden, and Gardnerville, Nevada, fall within ancient Washo territory, as do Truckee, Tallac, and Woodfords, California. According to Barrett, even a small region west of the Sierra, on the headwaters of the Mokelumne, Calaveras, and Stanislaus rivers, falls within the Washo area. Kroeber sets their total number in 1770 at possibly 1500, one-third of the total being in California, where more recent figures indicate approximately 300. But separatism was extreme: Jack Pitts had been to Lake Tahoe a single time, political units hardly embraced more than six or seven families, and only festivals united larger gatherings.

Bill distinguished the Washo about Woodfords and of Antelope Valley as ha'ɣalɛ'lt'i, those near Minden and Gardnerville being p'a''walu, and the Reno Washo we'lmelt'i. Though distinct, these groups had never waged war with one another. Bill associated the Washo with Mountain House and Bagley Valley but did not consider Antelope Valley ancient Washo territory, rather assigning it to the "Paiute," that is, Paviotso. When about 30, he himself came there, and at that time there were not many Washo in that locality.

Three alien tribes figure prominently: the "Paiute," that is, Paviotso (pa''le.u), whom the Carson Valley Washo sometimes visited near the Walker River; the "Digger," that is, Maidu (teobi'muc), about Placerville and Colfax; and "another kind of Digger" (tannu'), distinct in speech from the Maidu,—presumably Miwok. The two former were definitely noted as periodically hostile, the Washo trying to exclude both from Lake Tahoe. The Maidu often took game away from the Washo, even killing them, and thus precipitated fighting.

[1] S. A. Barrett, The Washo, PMM-B 2:1–52, 1917. Grace Dangberg, Washo Texts, UC-PAAE 22:391–443, 1927. A. L. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California, BAE-B 78:569–573, 944, 1925. S. Culin, Games of the North American Indians, BAE-B 24:199, 265, 322 f., 335, 396, 523, 664, 704, 1907.

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4:Downs E-5 (no date) 1961 NT20 Washo NT20

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WASHO RELIGION

BY

JAMES F. DOWNS

INTRODUCTION

114
131 This paper will devote itself to a description of the religious life of the Washo Indians living in the communities of Sierraville, Loyalton, and Woodfords, in California, and Reno, Carson City, and Dresslerville, Nevada. Smaller numbers are scattered throughout the area which was their aboriginal range, roughly from the southern end of Honey Lake to Antelope Valley and from the divide of the Pinenut Range in Nevada, almost to Placerville, California.

114 A short ethnography by Barrett dealing in large part with material culture, Lowie's Ethnographic Notes, and Stewart's Element Lists constitute almost the only general references on Washo culture. Various other writers have dealt with specialized questions such as linguistics (Kroeber, Jacobson), peyotism (Siskin, d'Azevedo), and music (Merriam).

161 Most of the statements about the Washo give the im-
114 pression that they have long been on the edge of oblivion (Mooney, Kroeber, etc.), and population estimates have been well under one thousand for the past fifty years. However, I find myself in agreement with d'Azevedo[1] that the Washo are a vigorous and continuing cul-
101 tural entity. My own rather impressionistic estimate of population is that there are perhaps two thousand Indians in the area who consider themselves as Washo and form a part of a viable cultural unit.

114 My own field work was devoted to an attempt to trace the patterns of change among these people since
[115] the entrance of the white man into their area. To this end I spent a great deal of time with older informants,
[178] but my work was not exclusively "salvage ethnography." Many aspects of Washo culture have changed dramatically in the past century; this is particularly true in the area of material culture and subsistence activities.
114 On the other hand, I was impressed by the tenacity of
182 the less material aspects of the culture. The always-difficult-to-define world view or ethos of the Washo, which so clearly separates them from other cultures, is very much an entity expressed in the attitudes and actions of the Washo Indians, whether they are oldsters who can remember many aspects of the "old days" or children who have not yet entered the newly integrated schools of Nevada. This continuity seems most clearly expressed in the area which we subsume under the title "Religion." Almost all Washo, even the youngsters, are familiar with, or at least aware of, Washo mythology, attitudes about ghosts, spirits, medicine, and a number of ritual actions and beliefs which are common elements in Washo life today.

This is not to imply that Washo religious activity has not been affected by the tremendous changes which have taken place in western Nevada and eastern California. I suggest that rather than disappearing under

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[1] W. L. d'Azevedo, basing his opinions on extensive field work in the area, contends that early estimates of Washo population were incorrect and that modern figures based on these estimates are inaccurate. A contemporary estimate, made by a resident journalist in 1881, was somewhat over 3,000.

5:Kroeber E-5 (no date)1925 NT20 Washo NT20

two rivers has not been ascertained with accuracy. It seems to have been but a little below Reno and Carson City. Long Valley Creek, which drains northwestward into Honey Lake, a Californian stream, was also in their possession. West of the crest of the Sierra they had no settlements, but the Miwok acknowledged their hunting rights on the upper Stanislaus nearly as far down as the Calaveras Big Trees. They may have enjoyed similar privileges elsewhere. Where there are no winter villages, information is often conflicting: boundaries may have been in dispute, or amicably crossed. If the Washo hunted on the North Stanislaus they may have come down the Middle Fork also, or frequented the Calaveras, Cosumnes, or American. Sierra Valley has been assigned both to them and the northeastern Maidu. The deep snows prevented more than temporary occupation. Honey Lake, too, may have been more largely Washo than the map (Pl. 46, 1/1) shows, or entirely forbidden to them.

Lake Tahoe is central to Washo territory, and was and is still resorted to in summer, but its shores are scarcely habitable in the season of snow.

The Washo call themselves Washiu or Wasiu. The names applied to them by their neighbors are unknown, except for northern Maidu Tsaisuma or Tsaisū. Northern Miwok Hisatok or Histoko means merely "easterners."

The Washo were at times in conflict with the adjacent Northern Paiute, whom they call Paleu, and by whom they are said to have been defeated about 1860.

NUMBERS.

There are the usual statements, some made as much as 50 years ago, about enormous decrease and degeneration or impending extinction; but actually the Washo seem to have suffered less diminution as a consequence of the invasion of our civilization than the vast majority of California Indians. Estimates of their population were: In 1859, 900; 1866, 500; 1892, 400; 1910, 300. The Federal census in this last year enumerated over 800, about one-third in California and two-thirds in Nevada, some three-fourths or more being full blood. As the Washo are distinctly separated from the "Paiutes" and the "California Diggers" in the local American consciousness, it is not likely that this figure involves any erroneous inclusions of consequence. Their lack of any reservation, and the semiadjustment of their life to civilized conditions, leading to a scattering habitation on the fringes of white settlements, have evidently caused a persistent underestimation of their numbers.

Their original strength may have been double what it is to-day; 1,500 or under seems a likely figure in view of the nature of their country, their solidarity, and their unity of speech.

1/1 [this plate has not been processed]
--Analyst

13 The physical environment of Washo territory is marked by its variety of terrain, climate, flora, and fauna, primarily due to variations in altitude 133 within a comparatively small area. The Sierra Nevada rises gradually to the east of the central valley of California from near sea level to peaks over 10,000 feet in altitude, then it drops abruptly on the eastern slope to about 361 5,000 feet. Generally the Washo lived at 4,500 to 5,500 feet in the valleys 133 east of the Sierra Nevada; around 5,500 to 7,500 in the highlands; and their treks took them down to 3,000 feet on the west side of the Sierra. This gave them a wide range of habitats in mountain-valley terrain.

132 The highlands and western slopes had yellow pine, fir, and hemlock [137] vegetation; a transitional and boreal life zone; humid mesothermal and microthermal climates; and zones receiving between 10 to 60 inches of annual precipitation. In the mountains the summers are warm, with rains through July. Snows start in November, followed by cold weather with freezing nights until April.

[137] In the lowlands to the east of the Sierra Nevada the Washo had pinon and juniper vegetation, an upper sonoran life zone, and an arid-cold-steppe [241] climate (Elsasser 1960, 3-6). These areas have 100-140 days of growing season and all farming requires irrigation (Department of Economic Development n.d.). The weather station at Minden, Nevada is 4,730 feet above sea level. It has recorded an annual precipitation of 8.73 inches, an average growing season of 144 days from May 29 to September 20, a high maximum temperature of 109° F. and a low maximum of -24° F.

Throughout Washo territory the average variability of annual precipitation is around 20-25%. In the months of December through February 60-70% of possible sunshine is received and the figure is 80-90% in the months of June through August.

433 The mountains and lakes (especially Lake Tahoe), the high percentage of [457] sunny days, and legalized gambling in Nevada make tourism the major industry 233 in Washo territory today. Cattle raising and dairying are the most important [234] agrarian industries. Lumbering and mining are of minor importance (Department of Economic Development n.d.).

[313] Compared with other tribes in the Great Basin the Washo occupied a very [36] abundant environment. Hamilton described the Truckee River country in 1844 16 as "a hunter's paradise, with the streams full of fish and blue grouse in every [13] direction" (Sieber 1951, 162). This abundance is reflected in the fact that the Washo had a higher population density than any other Great Basin tribe. Kroeber (1947, 137) gives a figure for the Washo that comes out as 2.4 square miles per person. The average population density for all of the Great Basin was roughly 15 square miles per person (Steward 1938, 46).

A few Northern Paiute and Shoshoni groups did make intensive use of small areas so that their population densities approached or even exceeded that of the Washo tribe. Steward (1938, 47-48) presents the Owens Valley Paiute (2.1 sq. mi. per person) and Shoshoni groups along the Humboldt River (3.3 to 5.2 sq. mi. per person) as examples of high population density for the Great Basin.

In the estimate given above, Kroeber was using a population of 1,000 for the Washo in an area of 6,200 km^2 (2,394 square miles). Earlier, Kroeber (1925, 944) had estimated a population of about 1,500 for the year A.D. 1770. This latter figure is probably closer to the Washo population in the middle 1800's. Furthermore, Washo territory was clearly larger than Kroeber's estimate. The Washo land claim case against the government in 1951 comprised a total of 9,872 square miles. This, in turn, appears to be an overstatement in terms of what is currently meant by aboriginal territory (cf., Indian Claims Commission 1959). The Washo had knowledge and some use of approximately 12,000 square miles in their "nuclear" and "peripheral lands". They made intensive use of less than 2,000 square miles, while their "nuclear" territory comprised about 4,000 square miles. Thus, population and territory figures suggest a density that is high for the Great Basin: 1,500 persons in 4,000 square miles or 2.7 square miles per person.

Physical Type

The published physical description of the Washo Indians consists of a few photographs and a series of anthropometric measurements made by Gifford (1926). These measurements were published in "Californian Anthropometry" along with several other samples. The accuracy of the description of any particular group presented in "Californian Anthropometry" is questionable on the grounds of the small sample sizes. For example, cephalic indices were listed for 48 groups, but 1/2 of these groups consisted of a sample of 8 or less with 10 groups represented by only one individual. The mean sample size for these 48 series with data on cephalic index is 16.3. In spite of its negative aspects, "Californian Anthropometry" is the only primary source on Washo anthropometry.

The physical types found by Gifford for the California Indians are listed below with the criteria that he used. Facial index (FI), nasal index (NI), and cephalic index (CI) should be read as 80 or lower (80-) and 80 or higher (80+). Stature (St) is given in centimeters so that 170 would be equivalent to 5 feet and 7 inches.

absent in 7 and slight in 9. Lip thickness ranged from 3 medium thin, to 8 medium to 4 medium thick, and 1 thick. Chin prominance showed as 9 prominant, 2 medium-prominant, and 4 medium. 141

The Washo sample of 16 contained little anthropometric variation from one individual to the next. In a table of standard deviations by Gifford on the cephalic index, facial index, and nasal index of 15 groups with samples of 10 or more individuals, the Washo were next to being the least variable with a mean of standard deviations of 3.81. The most variable group had a mean of 6.71. This implies a relatively stable inbreeding population for the Washo. [161]

Kennedy (1959) included Gifford's data on the Washo in a general survey of Great Basin anthropometry. Kennedy (p. 13) described five physical type areas with the Washo in the "Western Area." "The Western Area (California from the Oregon line to the southern periphery of the Great Basin) contains people with broader heads than are to be found in the Northern Area, and brachycephaly is common for females. The faces are euryprosopic. The nose is mesorrhine, but as one moves southward the nose becomes broader."

Kennedy found the majority of the highest absolute mean values for all measurements and indices and the greatest degree of variability in the Western Great Basin. He also found a tendency toward brachycephaly, broader faces, and higher stature in the west.

Kennedy's averages for Great Basin living male crania are included for comparative purposes in the following anthropometric description of the Washo from Gifford's material. The measurements from two groups that border Washo territory are also included, the Central Miwok to the west and the Northern Paiute to the east. All three of these groups were classified by Gifford as belonging to the "narrow-nosed subtype" of the "California type" in the "high-faced" division. The "Sa" refers to the sample size.

	Washo		No. Paiute		C. Miwok		Great Basin
	Sa		Sa		Sa		
Cephalic index	16	84	16	80	16	88	79.51
Facial index	10	82	11	83	16	84	82.28
Nasal index	11	77	11	78	16	79	78.94
Stature - men	6	173	6	169	4	165	166.9
Stature - women	5	158	3	160	1	152	
Ear index	16	51	13	50	6	48	
Reach index - men	6	102	6	104	4	101	
Reach index - women	5	103	3	99	1	104	
Head length - men	6	190	6	195	9	184	192.24
Head length - women	5	181	5	185	7	177	
Head breadth - men	6	158	6	155	9	162	153.17
Head breadth - women	5	152	5	145	7	156	
Face length - men	6	125	6	125	9	129	119.92

	Washo		No. Paiute		C.Miwok		Great Basin
	Sa		Sa		Sa		141
Face length - women	5	120	5	117	7	118	
Face breadth - men	6	151	6	150	9	152	
Face breadth - women	4	145	5	140	7	143	
Nose length - men	6	55	6	57	9	56	52.60
Nose length - women	5	52	5	51	7	53	
Nose breadth - men	6	43	6	44	9	45	43.57
Nose breadth - women	5	40	5	40	7	41	
Ear length - men	6	69	4	67	3	73	
Ear length - women	5	67	5	66	3	72	
Ear breadth - men	6	34	4	34	3	35	
Ear breadth - women	5	35	5	30	3	35	

Although the use of such small samples in the above data limits the level of confidence we can have in any theoretical statements, a few tentative remarks may be made. In spite of linguistic and geographical barriers, the Washo appear racially very similar to their neighbors to both the east and west of the Sierra Nevada. [114]

The close similarity in the indices and measurements of these groups is an indication of a relatively large inbreeding population. On the other hand, the Washo sample showed a low degree of variability from one individual to the next, an indication that a small homogenous gene pool is present. There is ethnographic evidence to support both views. The Washo did intermarry with the Northern Paiute, in Antelope Valley and probably at the Honey Lake area as well. The Washo also carried on trade and social intercourse with the central valley Californian peoples. In fact, part of Gifford's sample (not included here) contained Washo individuals who had one non-Washo parent. One also hears of the social conservatism of the Washo and their past fears of Miwok and Northern Paiute raids, factors against outbreeding. 582 141 161 [143] [439] [648]

Social Organization

Compared with primitive peoples generally, the Washo kinship system is neither elaborate nor extensive. There is little emphasis on lineage or ancestors. "The Washo lacked sibs, lineages, and clans" (Freed 1960, 361). Reckoning of descent is bilateral. Certain behaviors that are rigidly prescribed in many primitive societies are absent in Washo society. There is no mother-in-law avoidance. Monogamy, polygny, and polyandry (fraternal) are all practiced, although monogamy is most common and polyandry is rare. Sororal polygny and the levirate occur, but neither the sororate nor the levirate are required. This writer has knowledge of only two apparently polyandrous marriages.[1] 61 64 602 606 595 587

Residence after marriage is usually bilocal (that is, patrilocal or matrilocal), but the couple may move in with relatives other than the parents. Inheritance 591

Mormons recalled to Utah by Brigham Young.

1858 - The Comstock Lode was discovered at Virginia City and in the next two years an estimated 20,000 people came into Washo territory in the "rush to Washoe". 175

The newspaper "Territorial Enterprise" began in Genoa.

The telegraph line reached Genoa from Placerville.

1859 - The Carson Valley Indian Agent, Major J. Dodge (1859) wrote "The Washo Nation number about 900 souls, and inhabit the country along the base of the Sierra Nevada mountains, from Honey Lake on the north, to the west fork of Walker's River on the south. They are divided into three different bands. 'Capt. Jim's' band is located in the vicinity of Carson, Washo, and Eagle Valleys, and Lake Bigler. This band numbers 145 men, 110 women, and 87 children. Total - 342. I have had talk with this band and given them some presents. 'Capt. Jim' is the head of the nation. 175 161 131 175 621 162 622

'Pos-Larke's'band is located in Little Valley between the east and west forks of Carson River, and numbers about the same as Capt. Jim's band, 340.

'Deer-Dicks' band lives in and claims Long Valley southeast from Honey Lake, and numbers about 300.

...I would here recommend that a large extent of country be taken up, and all in one body, and to concentrate the whole 'Py-Ute' and 'Wa-Sho' Nations upon it, making one expense do for both. 175

...A few days ago a Wa-Sho died from actual starvation and exposure in the vicinity of Lake Bigler which is situated in the 'Sierra Nevada Mountains,' and another was found dead at the base of those mountains yesterday from the same cause." [165]

The severe winter this year was blamed on the Whites by the Washo. [821]

Commercial fishing began by Whites on Lake Tahoe when the "Fishery" was established on the southeast shore of the lake (Scott 1957). [648]

Isaac L. Roop became the 1st Governor of "Nevada Territory" and J. B. Blake hosted the 1st territorial legislature.

1860 - Battle of Pyramid Lake, involving the Northern Paiute and Whites.

5,000 acres of land under cultivation on the East Fork of the Carson River. 10,000 head of cattle, horses, and hogs were pastured in [648]

western Nevada (Thompson and West 1881, 87). Overgrazing depleted Washo food in grass seeds and permanently effected the ecological balance in this period. 175 648

1861 - Warren Wasson, U. S. Indian Agent at Carson Valley Agency, in reports to Governor Nye of Nevada Territory in July and August wrote "within the limits of this Agency...the Washoes number 550...have no property of any kind...they have no schools...They have learned that the great chief or captain at Washington, through the lesser captain here, must feed them or help to do so at least. There is great justice in this request. The streams in which they formerly fished are now all spoiled for that purpose by the operating of the miners and the washing of the ores and metals. They are indeed most all diverted from their original courses, or dammed so frequently that the fish have disappeared from them. Lake Bigler, lying in the country of the Washoes, and from which they formerly obtained large quantities of the best kind of fish, is now taken possession of by the whites, and has become a watering place, to which large numbers from this Territory and California resort, and from which this poor tribe are virtually excluded. The hills and plains over which roamed plenty of game are now occupied by the Whites, and the game has fled, like the Indians from their presence" (Ingalls 1913, 35). [161] [171]

U. S. Congress approved Nevada Territory under pressure of the slavery question and the wealth of Comstock mining. 175

1862 - "By 1862 Burke and Company were using a half-mile seine to take tons of Tahoe trout daily from the waters of Boundary Bay" (Scott 1957, 443).

1863 - Silver Mountain (first known as Koenigsberg) was a mining boom town in the 1860's with a population of 3,000. (California Interstate Telephone Co. 1959, 3).

1864 - Statehood proclaimed for Nevada, 36th state.

1868 - First transcontinental railroad, Central Pacific, completed through Nevada. With the coming of the railroad new towns sprang up as centers for ranches and farms.

A Washo shot by a homesteader for setting a fish trap on a creek leading into Lake Tahoe (Scott 1957, 64). [648]

1870 - 11,500 acres of land under cultivation on the East Fork of the Carson River.

consequently, were the biological family and the small winter village, consisting of a loose aggregate of families...Because...of the erratic occurrence of wild seeds and the frequent variation of terrain covered, alliance did not always bring together the same families or village members. Habitual cooperation of the same people and therefore the development of fixed if limited political allegiances and controls was impossible. Likewise, habitual and exclusive utilization of particular territories by certain groups could not develop....Though kinship ties were important, the uncertainties of residence and of assured association with specific relatives prevented the development of an elaborate and nicely fixed set of kinship duties and obligations..."

621 433 22 171

Also ecology "permitted, if it did not cause, band development" in Owens Valley and "in late pre-Caucasian times among the Northern Shoshoni and probably the Ute."

The present writer has tried to show that "warfare, festivals, ceremonies, etc." should not be called "noneconomic", although they may be predominantly something other than economic. All groupings have some economic dimensions. However, Steward's point is well taken. He implies that as the natural abundance of food increased or the techniques of exploitation and transportation improved the nature of groupings became less determined by the search for food.

621 433 22 114

This present writer accepts the major outlines of Steward's theory, but must add that it was not entirely true for the Washo. The Washo had one of the more productive natural environments in the Great Basin and this was reflected in their being closer in form of sociopolitical groupings to the Owens Valley Paiute than the Western Shoshoni. However, when we compare seasonal variations of aboriginal social organization it is clear that predominantly economic activities determined the nature of groupings in the abundant summer as well as the meager winter.

Also Washo sociopolitical groupings were not radically altered by the comparatively abundant food made available by Whites. There is support for the idea that the cultural traditions behind sociopolitical grouping have some degree of internal dynamics and resistance to change, apart from economic changes, in the facts of Washo acculturation.

Barriers to Economic Development

433

The Washo lived in an area of abundance for a hunting, fishing, and gathering economy. They used this abundance to an advantage and, for a Great Basin tribe, had a dense population. Still they were surprisingly low in economic development. Kroeber (1939, 137) ranked the Washo on the

[161]

237
Rabbit skins were also cut into strips and woven into warm robes. Conical 513
houses were made of wooden poles and brush thatch for winter weather
while a half-dome windbreak served for warm weather. 342

The household of a family and relatives in a single winter house was the 592
basic socioeconomic unit of society. Each household worked and shared 22
together in solving the problems of survival and fulfilling social and ritual
obligations. The household continued to fish, hunt, and collect its food in
a fairly uniform way year after year in the same sector of Washo territory. If
the fishing was poor in one place, they moved to another stream. If the pine-
nuts failed, they went to the west and gathered acorns. And wherever they
went, they hunted or gathered what was available: some tree grubs here,
a lettuce-like vegetable there, and a squirrel or rabbit or bird at the next
place. The procurement and preparation of food was clearly the most time
consuming activity in Washo life.

Men and women often worked together at the same tasks, but there was 462
some division of labor by sex. Men hunted and except for basketry, were
the craftsmen who made the clothing, houses, and hunting and fishing gear.
Women gathered plant and insect foods, prepared and cooked them, made the
baskets, and tended the children. A few individuals specialized to a degree [463]
in becoming shamans, midwives, herbalists, or particularly adept in a craft.

Sharing, as the economic basis of family life, was the very essence of 43
Washo economy. Sharing found expression in the producing task groups
that drew members from more than one household. It was through sharing
that the vast majority of goods changed hands. Exchange, with a stronger
demand for reciprocal equivalence than sharing, characterized the economic
aspects of social rituals, as well as the more impersonal forms of distribution
such as gambling, trade, and payments made for services rendered.

Washo economy appears in a few ways to be distinctive in the Great Basin. 433
The Washo ranged a particularly productive environment which allowed them [161]
the highest population density in the Basin. The Washo may have had less [439]
trade than the surrounding peoples because of several factors, language
isolation being one. Pinenut groves were privately owned, a rare phenomenon [423]
in the Basin. Washo techniques for gathering and storing pinenuts, in strips
and the construction of great caches, is also perhaps unique in the Basin and [251]
inadvertantly presented them with another unique phenomenon, overproduction.

There are still broad gaps in our knowledge of Washo aboriginal life. The 114
data are fairly complete on language and mythology, but the rest of Washo
culture has been only sketched out in its major outlines. Most of this is [174]
unrecoverable and only by careful interviewing, archeology, and scrutiny
of historical documents can we hope to reconstruct a way of life that began
to disappear over 100 years ago.

7:Powell E-5 (1952-1967)1980 MT20 Washo MT20

[P.350, B]

I. THE WASHO INDIANS

131

passing just west of Virginia City; then north to a point a few miles east of Reno, and from there northwest to Honey Lake. The western boundary followed the crest of the Sierra Nevada. Lake Tahoe and the eastern half of Sierra Valley were in Washo territory, as were the modern towns of Woodfords, Truckee, and Loyalton, California; and Reno, Carson City, Minden, and Gardnerville, Nevada (Barrett, 1917, pp. 5-7; Curtis, 1924, pp. 97, 99; Kroeber, 1925, pp. 569-570; Lowie, 1939, p. 301; Merriam, MS; Siskin, 1956, pp. 626-627; Stewart, 1944, p. 66).

POPULATION

161

Estimates of the aboriginal population vary considerably. Kroeber (1925, p. 570) gives the total in pre-white times at possibly 1,500. Mooney estimates 1,000 Washo in 1845, the date he considers to mark the end of the aboriginal period. Mooney believes that the Washo population had fallen to 300 by 1907 (1928, p. 20). This last figure differs markedly from Curtis' estimate of 800 Washo only three years later in 1910 (1924, p. 91). The Washo tribal secretary, Ronald James, estimates the present-day Washo at 850. Many of them have moved to the cities; probably no more than 600 remain within the boundaries of what was formerly Washo territory.

GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS

619

There are three geographically distinct groups of Washo. Those living north of Carson City, Nevada, are called wɨlmalíl'. Washo living in the Carson Valley are called ɸá·wa'la', and the California Washo are called hɨqalalíl', with the present California-Nevada border being the approximate dividing line between these last two groups (Kimpson, 1876, pp. 93-94; Curtis, 1924, p. 98). I know of no cultural differences between these two groups, but the wɨlmalíl' are said to differ from the other two by their slow manner of speech. In the spring and summer, when the Washo moved up to Lake Tahoe, the wɨlmalíl' camped mainly around the northern half of the lake from McKinney around to Glenbrook. The ɸá·wa'la' lived on the western side of the lake south of McKinney, and the southern and eastern lake shore was mixed hɨqalalíl' and ɸá·wa'la'. However, any family was free to camp anywhere around the lake.

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221
619

SEASONAL MIGRATIONS

221

The Washo were migratory hunters, fishers, and gatherers. A family usually spent the winter in the Pine Nut Mountains. In the spring, the able-bodied men and women went to Lake Tahoe to fish. The rest of the family moved into the great valleys east of the Sierra Nevada where they searched for roots, grass seeds, birds, birds' eggs, and berries. From time to time, someone who had gone to the lake would carry

8: Merriam& d'Azevedo E-4, 5 (1954-1955) 1957
NT20 Washo NT20

Washo Peyote Songs

ALAN P. MERRIAM
Northwestern University
AND
WARREN L. D'AZEVEDO
Northwestern University

I

The Washo

THE Washo people of Nevada and California have been described linguistically as a small Hokan-speaking group among the Shoshonean-speaking peoples of the Great Basin (Kroeber 1907; Lowie 1939). They formerly inhabited a relatively abundant territory extending from Honey Lake in the north to Antelope Valley and Sonora Pass in the south, and from the Pinenut Range east of Carson Valley in Nevada to Lake Tahoe and the summit of the Sierra-Nevada Mountains of California in the west. Present population is variously reported at between 400 and 1000 individuals; the figures on file at the Nevada Indian Agency in Stewart, Nevada, support the larger estimates.

The Washo were formerly distributed in small, band-like communities composed of semi-exogamous extended families which made use of the full range of their diversified setting in hunting and gathering, and were thus a highly mobile population. In recent times, however, there has been an increasing tendency to cluster in small colonies in or near the older white settlements of Nevada and California, and on the few remaining allotment acres provided by the government many years ago. The major source of money-income for families is provided by those members who are employed as laborers on road-construction gangs, ranches, and farms. A few women work as servants in the towns and resorts. There is little use of the land for agricultural purposes, while hunting, fishing, and gathering still provide an important part of subsistence. Despite the often drastic conditions of acculturation during the past one hundred years, the Washo have maintained considerable homogeneity as an ethnic and cultural minority.

The Peyotists

Peyotism among the Washo is scarcely more than twenty years old, having been introduced by one Ben Lancaster, a member of the tribe who had learned the ritual and ideology during a long sojourn among eastern and southern tribes. In 1936 he started the proselyting which resulted in the creation of an enthusiastic group of Washo and Paiute adherents during the period 1936–39. By 1940, however, the movement had already become defunct, and meetings were no longer held in Washo territory. Ben Lancaster continued to preside over the embittered and secretive remnants of the cult, which consisted of a handful of loyal Paiute and a very few Washo members. He also erected an

INTRODUCTION

Like many other Great Basin peoples the Washo have been unevenly studied by professional anthropologists. A common theme that runs through much of the early written comment, and into the ethnographic literature of the first few decades of this century, is the anticipation of their imminent extinction. In the very earliest accounts of mountain men and travelers they were frequently mistaken for Paiutes, and in the reports of the Indian agents of the 1850's and 60's they were seldom considered worthy of mention except as an extremely depressed and dependent group in the process of dying out or being absorbed by their more aggressive neighbors.

Population figures reported during the 19th century were highly contradictory and misleading, for they failed to take into account the extreme mobility of the Washo, and the dispersed character of settlement pattern even during the winter months. Furthermore, the Indian agents were concerned primarily with those peoples within their areas of jurisdiction who presented well defined administrative and political problems to the government in the protection of the interests of American migrants and settlers. The Washo offered minimal resistance to the intruders. They were never sufficiently organized to make effective demands in their own behalf, and within a very few years of contact part of the population had established itself in semi-sedentary dependent colonies around white settlements. It was groups of this sort -- particularly in the vicinity of major white settlements in the Carson and Truckee valleys -- that were identified as "The Washo tribe" in early reports. Little or nothing was known of actual territorial distribution of the people, and agents were ignorant of many bands that maintained some degree of autonomy and isolation.

Another factor of importance in defining the status of the Washo as a group is the placement of their territory in relation to westward American expansion. The core of this territory is made up of a chain of fertile valleys on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevadas from Antelope Valley in the south to Honey Lake in the north. The abundance of water, fish, small game, edible plants and seeds made this a relatively rich region for hunters and gatherers. The extensive growth of pinenut trees on the mountains forming the eastern boundaries of their territory and the availability of acorns on the western slope of the Sierras provided large harvests of staple seeds. Large game was also plentiful in the mountains.

The attractiveness of this region, and its potentialities for farming and grazing, were noted by the first travelers who passed through it to California after enduring the arduous trek across the dry expanse of the

central Great Basin. By the end of the 1840's there were a number of rest stations for emigrants, at the foot of new trails across the Sierras, in Carson and Eagle valleys, on the Truckee River, and in Sierra Valley. Thousands of head of cattle were grazed there, and wagon trains paused for months at a time waiting for the appropriate season for the final crossing. By 1859 gold had been discovered in the area, logging and lumber became a major industry, ranches and farms created a network of fences in most of the valleys, and numerous white settlements had sprung up containing a rapidly increasing population of permanent settlers, miners and laborers.

There is some evidence that the Washo may have suffered a drastic decrease in population and some tribal disorganization prior to these events of the 1840's and 50's. Extensive epidemics had raged through the Indian tribes of central California during the first few decades of the 19th century, and Washo legend contains numerous references to the devastation of entire bands by disease before the period of American settlement. There are also legends of early Spanish expeditions, the working of mines in the mountains, and the capture of Washo children. The publication of more of the records of these expeditions may bring to light material of considerable importance with regard to initial Washo contacts with non-Indians.

At the point of first intensive white contact in the late 1840's and early 1850's the Washo also appear to have been under attack from mounted groups of Paiute, and there is every indication that their willingness to cooperate with whites was a response to the need for protection from Paiute raiding. The Washo never adopted the horse for hunting or warfare as did their neighbors directly to the east, and this fact put them at a great disadvantage during the tumultuous years of competition between the newly emergent raiding bands of the Paiute and the white emigrants. That they never surmounted the effects of this initial inferiority of status is borne out by their almost total eclipse in official records during the remainder of the 19th century, and by the neglect of their desperate condition on the part of government and local administrators. This is all the more curious in view of the fact that they appear to have increased in population during the past hundred years, and have maintained viable social groups and cultural continuity.

Though historical documentation and early ethnographic comment concerning the Washo are meager, what resources do exist are of great potential value to the student of their culture. The first phase of the historical record is that marked by the journals and reports of trappers, explorers and emigrants prior to 1850. The initial venture over this section of the Sierras appears to be that of Jedediah Smith and a party of trappers who went into Spanish California by way of Walker Pass in 1825 or 1826. In 1833 Joseph Walker led a party of trappers up the Truckee River to California, and a diary of the trip was kept by Zenas Leonard, a member of the party.

9: d'Azevedo et al. E-4,5 (1952-1961) 1963 NT20 Washo NT20

WASHO PREHISTORY: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH

by John A. Price

Anthropological research dealing with the Washo Indians and their aboriginal territory has produced a considerable body of descriptive data, much of it amassed in the past decade. This paper will review that portion of the data pertaining to prehistory in Washo territory. [1]

Washo territory in the middle 1800's centered on Lake Tahoe in California and Nevada and the areas immediately to the north, east and south. Except for occasional wider ranging for gathering or trade, Washo territory extended from the south shore of Honey Lake south to Sonora Pass and the West Walker River in California. East to west their territory extended from the Pinenut Mountains in Nevada to several miles west of the main crest of the Sierra Nevada in California.

The physical environment of Washo territory is marked by its variety of climate, flora and fauna resulting from the variations in altitude which occur within a comparatively small area. The Sierra Nevada, a great tilted block, rises gradually to the east of the central valley of California from near sea level to peaks over 10,000 ft. in altitude and drops abruptly on its eastern slope in Nevada to around 5,000 ft. in elevation.

The Washo territory is characterized by yellow pine and fir vegetation in the highlands and by pinyon and juniper in the lowlands, ranging through Boreal, Transitional and Upper Sonoran life zones. A humid microthermal climate with 20 to 35 in. of precipitation annually obtains in the mountains while an arid cold-steppe climate is found in the low valleys. In the mountains the summers are warm with rains through July, snows starting in November, and cold weather with freezing nights until April. Snow often reaches more than 15 ft. in depth in some places in the mountains.

There are several estimates of Washo population. Fairfield (1916, 13-14) wrote that "In 1859 Major Dodge, the Indian Agent, reported that they number about 900"; Kroeber (1925, 944) estimated around 1500 for A.D. 1770; Lowie (1939, 301) wrote that "recent figures indicate approximately 300"; and Merriam and d'Azevedo (1957, 615) wrote that "Present population is variously reported at between 400 and 1000 individuals; the figures on file at the Nevada Indian Agency in Stewart, Nevada, support the larger estimates."

[1] [for an additional note regarding the preparation of this paper, see p. 92 -- Analyst]

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Two reactions appear common to both groups. One is avoidance; Washo tradition tells of watching wagon trains from hiding. Similar evidence from the Paiute supports the notion that they too were unwilling to associate with the travelers.

The second aspect of contact behavior was that of exploitation. The Paiute and Shoshoni in particular found wagon train livestock excellent sources of food. A hidden hunter would shoot several arrows into a straggling horse or cow and flee before he was located by the white men. After waiting until the white men were well out of the area the Indians would descend on the wounded animal, which, of course, had to be left by the travelers.[2] The Washo report that their first view of a cow was when they found one strayed from a wagon train. They packed the animal, rode it, generally examined it, and eventually killed and ate it. This suggests that the Washo had been watching passing wagon trains or had in other ways learned about riding and packing (Lowie, 1939, 302).

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The 1850's marked still another phase of the contact situation, that of permanent occupation. The wagon routes provided incentive to establish posts in eastern Nevada, and one was set up in Eagle Valley in the 1850's. Prior to 1852 a man named Clark had set up a ranch in Carson Valley. This he abandoned in fear after he killed an Indian, probably a Washo. In 1853 another family occupied the Clark Ranch. When a group of Indians -- again apparently Washo -- appeared demanding food, the householder shot one of their number (Angel, 1958, 145-9). I am inclined to think that the hostile intent of the Indians was small and that they were begging food in a manner that became common in later years. This suggests that the Indians viewed the apparently bountiful supplies of the white man as simply another source to be exploited by gathering (i.e., begging). In addition it reveals a distinct conflict in cultural attitudes. Sharing among these peoples was a common characteristic. It appears that in hard times there was no obligation to feed a visitor, but asking for food was certainly not considered a violation of norms.

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Between 1849 and 1851 Mormon colonists, sent out from Utah, established an agricultural community at Genoa. It appears that during this period Washo Indians established settlements around white habitations, utilizing the trash heaps as a source of food and building materials, and receiving handouts in return for odd jobs. An important unanswered question is whether the population of these settlements was permanent. I suspect that although the settlements remained at approximately the same population level there was a great deal of moving in and out by individual families going to other parts of Washo territory to hunt or gather. Estimates of Washo population appear to have been generally very low and often based on the

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2. I am indebted to Professor R.F. Murphy for information concerning Basin Indian "hunting" of wagon train stock (see also Angel, 1958, 145-9).

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number of people living in these settlements (Mooney, 1896; Kroeber, 1925). It is at least possible that a great many Washo lived in the mountains and other areas not generally visited by white men and went unnoticed.

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The year 1857 marks the discovery of the Comstock Lode and a dramatic change in the history of Nevada and of the indigenous populations. The primary activity of the white man shifted from a rather casual form of frontier pastoralism to an intensive exploitation of the mountains for silver and gold. Mining and the servicing of mining populations became the primary occupation. The flamboyant history of the Comstock has overshadowed the other activities of white men in the area at the time. Perhaps of equal importance to the study at hand is the rapid increase of stock raising.

Angel (1958, 67) reports that 10,000 head of cattle, horses and hogs were pastured in the general western Nevada area in 1860. The poor condition of the animals and the number of carcasses seen on the range is mentioned. This would suggest that the range was subjected to rather serious overgrazing, which must have depleted the grass and brush seed food sources of the Indians, as had Mormon ranching in Utah (Steward, 1938, 14). It is probable that the Paiute suffered more from this than did the Washo.

The Humboldt and Pyramid Lake region lies largely in the Artemisian life zone, which is characterized by xerophytic plants and few grasses or other possible food sources except after relatively heavy rains, or along the margins of watercourses and lakes. Since there are three large bodies of water and three rivers in the area we can assume that the Indians drew much of their sustenance from the edges of the water. Cattle would, of course, seek out the same areas and drastically reduce the supply. Moreover, Indians report that many areas now covered with useless plants were grasslands prior to the introduction of cattle or other livestock (Steward, 1938, 17). Even light grazing in such an area would seriously deplete, if not totally destroy, the food sources of the area. It is obvious that Indians occupying the area during their annual food circuit would be forced to move or make adjustments to the changed conditions. Judging from the population density figures for this area, the migration cycle may not have been too extensive, centering around the three lakes and the river banks, and shifting markedly only in the fall for pinenut harvests. The sudden introduction of cattle would have seriously upset the ecology. It is significant that the Paiute of this area were among the first to begin raiding white herds and habitations.

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The Washo, on the other hand, lived in a territory that comprised four life zones, Alpine, Aspen, Pinyon and Artemisian. A depletion in the Artemisian zone due to grazing might be partially compensated by greater dependence on other life zone sources and by utilization of white settlements as a food source,